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ABSTRACT

This study explored the portfolio evaluation process from the perspectives of teachers using portfolios to evaluate their students and teachers using portfolios of their own to evaluate their teaching. Two university professors, one elementary school teacher, and one secondary school teacher participated, using qualitative research methods. Qualitative research indicated that portfolios provided ways for teachers to reflect on diverse and sometimes conflicting purposes for evaluation. Learners gained self-awareness; and both learners and teachers were able to focus on change in ways that supported learning. Teacher portfolios offered ways for them to model the learning process for students. Findings support the belief that portfolio use can be implemented as a process by which students and teachers construct complex portraits of themselves. Attachments include "Portfolio Process and Teacher Change: Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Teachers Reflect on Their Initial Experiences with Portfolio Evaluation" by Ronald D. Kieffer and Mark A. Faust (in "Multidimensional Aspects of Literacy Research, Theory, and Practice" edited by Charles K. Kinzer and others, published by the National Reading Conference, Inc., 1994) and "Taking It Personally" (from "Portfolio News," v6 n3 Spring 1995) by Mark A. Faust, Ronald D. Kieffer, and Jane Hansen. (SLD)

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Portfolio Process: Teachers Exploring Assessment Alternatives

Final Report
Submitted to
The Spencer Foundation Small Grants Program

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Focus of the research

This study explored portfolio evaluation as a process from two perspectives: 1) teachers using portfolios to evaluate their students and 2) teachers using portfolios of their own to evaluate their teaching. The initial research questions included the following: How does portfolio process support authentic evaluation of language teaching and learning in elementary, secondary, and university classrooms? How are some teachers and students using portfolios in their classrooms? Have these practices altered the teaching/learning environment in the classroom? What is the role of reflection in the portfolio process? These exploratory questions initially guided the design of the study.

Since the researchers (two university professors, one elementary school teacher, and one secondary school teacher) were using qualitative research methods, additional questions were added as the study evolved: What are individual students actually learning in particular classrooms? How and why are these students learning? What evidence exists to support the claim that students are indeed learning what they need to be learning at a particular time? How might students themselves respond to questions about what they are learning and why? Who decides what students need to learn and on what basis are such decisions made? Can students assume some responsibility for their own learning? Is it possible to define standards without standardizing learning?

This study was influenced by the notion that portfolio evaluation can be profitably investigated as a process that students and teachers undertake together. Unlike much current research that focuses on portfolios as end products that are used solely for the purpose of judging student progress and

performance, this study sought to explore the potential benefits of using a portfolio process to foster self-reflection and self-evaluation on the part of teachers and students. The researchers acknowledged that such a process can be used to support various types of summative evaluation but they wanted to investigate what happens when this goal is seen by teachers and students as secondary to other evaluation purposes. The researchers hoped to document ways that teachers might use portfolios selectively for multiple purposes aimed at enhancing their ability to create conditions that support a range of literate behaviors in their classrooms.

Changes in plans

Early on the researchers began to distinguish between assessment (ways of gathering of data about learning) and evaluation (ways of defining the value of learning). They also questioned their implication that there might be one way of defining "the portfolio process" and began to favor instead a more open-ended view of "portfolio use as a process." In addition, it has become clearer to the researchers that defining portfolio use as a process is connected with ideas about teaching as learning and teaching as a form of research. Consequently, they would wish to amend the original title of this project to read: "Portfolio use as process: Teacher-researchers exploring assessment and evaluation alternatives."

Otherwise, the study proceeded as described in the original proposal. No substantive changes were made. Permission was requested and granted to extend the length of time allotted for the completion of Phases V and VI. A portion (approx. $400) of the funds designated for teacher release time were not spent because on a number of occasions the timing of interactive sessions did not necessitate the hiring of substitutes. A portion (approx $600) of the

funds designated for travel were not spent because the two teachers were unable to travel with the two principal investigators to attend the 1995 AERA convention in San Francisco.

Findings

This study resulted in numerous findings of great significance to anyone interested in using portfolios for purposes other than external evaluation. Some of these are summarized below; all are associated with a view of portfolio use as a process involving teachers and students in "researching" their classrooms as learning environments.

1. When viewed as a process, portfolios begin with questions about purpose and audience, questions about what children are learning and why which lead students and teachers to reflect on what is happening in their classroom.

2. The portfolio process continues with new questions about expectations (What exactly will teachers and students be doing during the process of portfolio creation?), collection (On what basis will the range of items that might be included in a portfolio be determined?), selection (On what basis will specific items be selected-or created-for inclusion in a portfolio?), Organization (What will the portfolio as a container look like?), and reflection (What will be the role of reflection throughout the process of creating a portfolio?).

3. There are multiple purposes for evaluation (e.g. judging, responding, and accounting--See attachment A: Kieffer, R. & Faust, M., 1994).

4. Multiple purposes for evaluation are revealed through metaphors used in discussion about learning and evaluation (e.g. proof, tool, growth, progress, vehicle, catalyst, portrait, story.)

5. Portfolios provide ways for teachers to reflect on diverse and sometimes conflicting purposes for evaluation which in turn can help them transform their classrooms into more coherent and supportive learning environments.

6. During various stages of reflection, learners gain self- awareness of their own literacies and the literacies of others, self-evaluate learning, name purposes and set related goals, and document important self-realization and change.

7. The process of creating a portfolio encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and to practice self-evaluation.

8. Portfolios enable teachers and students to focus on change in ways that support learning. Attending to change via portfolio process can be: non-judgmental, non-linear, retrospective, and individualized.

9. Teacher portfolios offer ways to model the learning process so students can learn how to see themselves as learners engaged in a similar process.

10. Portfolios can be used to foster teachers' self-knowledge about past and current teacher and learner practices (See attachment B: Faust, M., Kieffer, R. & Hansen, J., 1995)

11. Multiple voices (students, teachers, peers, parents) support teachers' ways of knowing about their instructional practices.

Research implications

This study lends credence to the notion that portfolio use can be implemented as a process whereby teachers and students construct complex portraits of themselves which make their learning visible in ways that are

overlooked or even suppressed by traditional evaluation procedures such as testing and graded writing. Furthermore, this study clearly suggests that a significant degree of student ownership of the process can foster an enhanced sense of purpose associated with classroom learning. From the teacher's perspective, approaching portfolio use as a process can also help to distinguish among competing evaluation purposes. Being clear about multiple evaluation purpose enables teachers to uphold clear standards while at the same time fostering a climate in which it is possible to acknowledge individual needs and learning goals.

Several factors distinguish this study from previous research on portfolio evaluation. First, the researchers created portfolios of their own along with their students. Second, the researchers collaboratively focused on issues of portfolio implementation as an ongoing process. This in-depth look at portfolio use as a process resulted in a complex view of possibilities and problems associated with using portfolios to support evaluation purposes in classroom settings. Third, the researchers achieved a personal realization that when portfolios are viewed as dynamic learning events rather than as static entities, they can serve as a catalyst for change (as opposed to merely documenting change) that can transform the way teachers and students see their classrooms as learning environments.

The dissemination of these findings beyond their immediate impact on the researchers' own work as classroom teachers has begun and will continue. Numerous presentations at the local level and three presentations at national conferences (National Reading Conference and AERA) have already occurred. An article recently published in Portfolio News (see Attachment B) is directly related to the research supported by this grant as is an article now under review with The Reading Teacher. A third article is currently being revised

for submission to a prominent research journal. In addition, teacher-researchers Ron Kieffer and Linda Morrison have continued to investigate portfolio process in elementary school classrooms with support from The National Reading Research Center.

The researchers wish to express their gratitude to The Spencer Foundation for supporting this study which has had a great impact on their lives and their work as educators.

ATTACHMENT A

PORTFOLIO PROCESS AND TEACHER CHANGE: ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, AND SECONDARY TEACHERS REFLECT ON THEIR INITIAL EXPERIENCES WITH PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

Ronald D. Kieffer and Mark A. Faust
University of Georgia

Portfolio process offers a way of evaluating students that may also become an important catalyst for teacher change. Portfolios, that is, systematic collections of student work that represent individuals as learners (Belanoff & Dickson, 1991; Flood, Lapp, & Monken, 1992, Graves & Sunstein, 1992; Rief, 1992; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991; Valencia, 1990), present to teachers, students, parents, and other interested individuals an opportunity to evaluate and plan for learning. The gathering of evidence from multiple sources such as work in progress, observation, peer response, and collaboration, in conjunction with reflection on the meaning and value of portfolio items with particular purposes and audiences in mind, can ultimately lead to introspection, self-evaluation, a synthesis of discoveries, and changes over time.

In this paper, we will present our views on portfolio use and power as a catalyst for teacher change. These views have been shaped by our involvement in a year-long research study using qualitative case study methods (interview, observation, survey) to investigate how 17 primary, middle, and secondary school teachers explored alternatives to traditional methods for assessing student performance and progress in language arts. Specifically, we will share some conclusions about how the teachers who participated in our study approached new ideas concerning student evaluation and record keeping. We discovered that these teachers were motivated to experiment with portfolios in part because they were troubled by evaluation and grading practices that too often failed to account for what students are really able to do. During the course of our interviews, questions about the primary purposes for evaluation and grading began to emerge. The teachers' year-long experience with portfolios only intensified these questions and concerns for them.

THE STUDY

Early in our university teaching careers, we each decided individually to use portfolios in our classes. Shortly thereafter, we realized that in addition to asking students to create a portfolio as a class assignment, there were other common threads linking our practice: We used *Portfolio Assessment in the Reading-Writing Classroom* (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991) as required reading, there were similarities and patterns to the questions we were asking about portfolio process, and both of us had begun experimenting with creating our own teacher portfolios. Shared reading and discussion led eventually to several local presentations that put us in touch with classroom teachers who were asking similar questions, 17 of whom agreed to participate with us to study the impact of portfolio use on their classroom practice. This group consisted of 2 kindergarten, 2 first-grade, 4 second-grade, 1 third-grade, 2 fourth-grade, 1 fifth-grade, 1 middle school, 1 gifted program, and 3 high school teachers. Initially, we were interested in describing the extent to which an emerging concept of *portfolio process* (i.e., expectations, purposes, questions, collection, selection, reflection, and audience) encouraged and supported authentic evaluation of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in primary and secondary classrooms (Faust & Kieffer, 1993). Our questions included the following: (a) How might portfolio process support evaluation of language learning in Grades K–9? (b) How are teachers and students using portfolios in their classroom? (c) Have these practices altered the teaching/learning environment in the classroom? and (d) What is the role of reflection in the portfolio process? Although these questions continue to be important to us, observing and talking with teachers about their experiences using portfolios with students has prompted us to focus on more basic questions about the underlying purposes for evaluation and grading.

Over the course of our year-long study, we used the following methods to collect data: (a) large group open-ended and exploratory interactions, (b) semi-structured teacher interviews, (c) surveys (pre and post), (d) observational field notes, and (e) in-depth interviews with select teachers and students. We assumed a participant role in the research process by asking open-ended questions, listening to the teachers challenge their assumptions about learning and evaluation, and by sharing a bit about ourselves and our use of portfolios in our university classrooms. We also found ourselves learning along with the teachers and changing in our thinking about portfolio process.

As the study proceeded, we became increasingly aware that our ongoing discussions with the 17 teachers resembled our own emerging views about portfolio use as a reflective process. This experience reinforced our sense that portfolio process begins with questions, rather than a definition of what portfolios should look like, questions about what children (and teachers) are learning and why. As a result, the focus of our study gradually shifted as we listened to teachers reflecting on the role of evaluation in the learning process and as the teachers began to consider portfolio use more as a process of reflection than as a search for final products.

Throughout the year, we conducted an ongoing analysis of the data as we sought to define the categories that emerged from the workshops, conferences, student interactions, teacher interviews, and field notes. These categories served as a basis for formulating tentative hypotheses that were examined in the light of additional data. An Apple micro-computer database management system called FileMaker II was used to sort data in a method similar to the index card method developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The format for this analysis was first developed within a funded research project through Ohio State University in conjunction with Apple Computers

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Inc. (see Tierney, Kieffer, Stowell, Desai, Whalin, & Moss, 1992). Approximately 40 hours of transcribed data were imported into the database management system. As we read the transcripts, we grouped ideas together and assigned headings. When new ideas emerged, categories were reviewed, narrowed, and expanded to fit new insights and subcategories were generated under each category heading. Codes were developed utilizing an "open coding" system suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The database management system allowed the viewing and reviewing of ideas that fit together allowing refinement of original headings. We sorted these data into clusters of related codes for further analysis.

PORTFOLIO PROCESS

As the 17 teachers thought about and discussed their experiences with portfolios, they continually asked questions and challenged accepted assumptions about evaluation and grading. The teachers asserted that they were dissatisfied with the sort of assessment practices going on in their schools and that they were looking for some alternative ways to evaluate student performance, assess student needs, and account for what students know. Overall, the teachers decided that many of the tools they were currently using, such as standardized tests and checklists, were counterproductive from the perspective of their emerging concerns.

The focus of our discussions shifted from trying to define what an ideal student portfolio might look like to speculating about how we might look at what students are capable of doing. It was evident to us that the teachers wanted to view evaluation as part of the learning process. Collection, selection, and reflection were mentioned over and over again as phases of a portfolio process that might reconnect evaluation and learning. As we talked about this goal, the teachers agreed that all three phases are crucial for the process to result in more than a folder that merely contains collected items. The physical object we call a portfolio only begins to take shape as learners select and arrange evidence of their learning with a particular audience and particular purposes in mind. When a student goes beyond saving his or her work to compose reflections exploring the meaning of this evidence, a work folder or scrapbook is transformed into a potentially powerful document representing that child as a self-aware learner.

Beyond this basic level of agreement, however, many challenging questions were raised about the implications of this way of thinking about evaluation. What exactly do we mean when we talk about "reflection"? What are the roles of questioning, purposes, audience, and student ownership in a vision of portfolio process? What are individual children actually learning in particular classrooms? How and why are these children learning? What evidence exists to support the claim that children are indeed learning what they need to be learning at a particular time? What types of expectations must be set by teachers? Is it possible to maintain standards without standardizing learning? Again and again we found questions such as these leading back to essential questions about the underlying purposes for evaluation as well as the relationship between evaluation and grading.

EVALUATION PURPOSES

We were surprised by the diversity of opinion we encountered following the teachers' initial efforts at implementing portfolios in their classrooms. Although each teacher agreed that evaluation methods ought to be linked with classroom practice in ways that support learning, we encountered disagreement about the precise implications of this conviction. Wrestling with basic but difficult questions about the connection between evaluation and learning resulted in a variety of stances toward the potential benefits of portfolio evaluation. Questions such as these came out in our discussions with the teachers: "What makes a person a good reader?" "Who judges what's creative and what's not?" "How do you get evidence of response?" "How does this information translate into a grade card?" "How do I get students to evaluate their own work?" The ways that the teachers responded to these questions were influenced by their overriding views about the purposes for evaluation.

Based on our research, we have identified three distinct purposes for evaluation, which we are calling *responding*, *judging*, and *accounting*. Each offers a sensible rationale for evaluation when considered in isolation from the other two and suggests a particular stance regarding the portfolio process described above, but to assume that these distinct purposes are either identical or automatically compatible appears to result in confusion and dissonance which was evident in both our own and the classroom teachers' visions of portfolio process. We have selected quotes from our interviews that illustrate different orientations toward the role of evaluation in learning and thus toward the potential form and function of portfolios. We hypothesize that bringing these differing orientations to light will lead to a greater variety of options with a higher level of coherence for teachers contemplating how they might use student portfolios to enhance their evaluation and grading practices.

Responding

The teachers we interviewed often expressed concern about their students making "progress" toward well-defined goals and in doing so positioned themselves along a spectrum ranging between a skills mastery approach to learning and a Deweyan approach to helping children think critically about problematic situations. Some of the teachers shared the value of responding to students' work in process during initial drafts and conference situations:

> Amy (11/24/92)—The teacher as coach thing is something that is really appealing to me and seems to be really working well. The "I'm on your side" instead of "I'm the enemy," that seems to be having a big effect. The kids are ready to come and ask for my help or ask my advice because I'm not the final evaluator. I'm the coach who's going to help them put a winning portfolio on the line to be evaluated.
>
> Betsy (10/30/92)—I used to just look at numbers in a grade book, now you can look more at the process rather than the end result. I think that's the main thing the portfolios have done for me, pay attention to the process, and the progress instead of the final outcome.

These two teachers are attending to their students' process and "progress" but from differing angles with Amy expressing more concern about her students arriving

at preset outcomes than Betsy who seems more willing to individualize instruction. In both their comments, we recognize a focus on "growth," on providing evaluative responses that help children identify and make "progress" toward specific educational goals.

Judging

The teachers in our study also talked often about recognizing and rewarding excellence. Many of them spoke about encouraging children to produce and display their "best work." Within this context, we recognized another spectrum of viewpoints on how best to define "performance":

> Melanie (08/20/92)—Well, I have been or had been a traditional kind of teacher. And I dissected my students' work. I mean, I taught the skills in isolation and now since we are moving away from that, I want to grade my, assess my students, assess their work on a whole, assess their end product.
>
> Nora (11/24/92)—I really think they (9th graders) understand performance, they understand that this writing is also performance just like running a 100 yard dash, just like doing the best cheer, just like drawing the best picture. They understand that concept and they've been using that concept since they took their picture home in kindergarten and mom hung it on the refrigerator. They understand the concept of performance. It's we who can't seem to go beyond the concept of grading, we can't seem to grasp the concept of performing a piece, of having a finished piece that we don't have to evaluate with all little picky, you know, the thesis statement is the last sentence in the paragraph . . . The real problem is that we've created artificial guidelines and artificial standards.

Here, a distinction between judging and responding is centered on the distinction between "performance" and "progress" with Melanie expressing more concern about "academic" performance than Nora. Both talked at length about struggling to reconcile the demands placed on them by two conflicting sets of evaluation purposes.

Accounting

A few teachers expressed concerns about the children in their classes becoming more aware of themselves as learners and reflecting on how they and others engage in learning as a process of change. These teachers spoke of trying to help children construct narratives about themselves as learners:

> Linda (written statement, Spring 1993)—Perhaps the most effective way to translate assessment information is to focus on the stories of individual children. One of my goals for the past school year was to use portfolios to document more authentic assessment in reading and writing. As I reflect on successes and failures toward meeting that goal, I realize that I've gained far more information about my students as learners than any standardized test score could provide.
>
> Hannah (11/18/92)—One of the things I'd like for them to realize is the fact that nobody is ever finished—you give an author back his book, he'd change something. The other thing I am real interested in these kids getting a handle on, and I'm glad it's happening in the ninth grade, the thing I want them to get the handle on is, I would really love for them to be able to learn how they learn. I see now with some of the seniors that I have when I asked them to think about how they came to this level, or how they came to this decision, they have no concept, they've never really introspected their thinking processes, so they don't know how they learn best. They still say "Oh, no I don't do well on this, and I don't do well on that." But, "Well, what *do* you do well on, and why do you do well on it?" And I'm hoping that the freshman will over the years. This isn't going to happen in a semester or two either. It took me close to four years, but I'm hoping that the freshman will begin to be introspective, think about what it is that they're doing, and why they're doing it, and what they hope to gain from it, instead of "Well am I going to do this because this is what the teacher wants?" What the teacher wants is for you to find out what you are all about as far as your learning is concerned. My subject matter is really kind of superfluous to the story in that respect.

The process of students giving an account or description of change over time is a powerful form of self-evaluation. These two teachers want the students in their classes to become more aware of themselves as learners. They believe that portfolios can become a central part of their classroom and that portfolios may be a way of celebrating what individuals can do using the language arts—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—while at the same time providing vital information about what might be appropriate learning goals for individuals and groups of students. Linda and Hannah also talked about the value of multiple voices, reflections from a wide array of potentially significant others drawn from within the school as well as the home and surrounding community. According to these teachers, accountability means discovering ways of helping students to document their own learning processes without sacrificing high expectations and standards. Redefining accountability so as to accommodate the learner's as well as the teacher's perspective via portfolios adds another dimension to evaluation.

CONCLUSIONS

Our research suggests that portfolio use can be linked with teacher change if questions about methodology do not overshadow questions about the purposes driving particular evaluation and grading practices. Our findings suggest that teachers who accept this line of questioning find themselves challenged to go further and reconsider their views on the connection between evaluation and learning as well as a potential discontinuity between purposes for evaluating and grading. At the conclusion of our year-long study, the participating teachers still felt uncomfortable about their evaluation methods. Each talked about reconsidering not just how they might use portfolios in their classrooms, but how their role as educators and as learners might change as a result of asking new questions. Along with them, we too feel that we are just beginning to understand where we might go from here. We are intrigued by the prospect that our evolving vision of portfolio process may help us differentiate among conflicting purposes for evaluation which in turn may help us transform our classrooms into more coherent and supportive learning environments.

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MULTIDIMENSIONAL ASPECTS OF LITERACY RESEARCH, THEORY, AND PRACTICE

Forty-third Yearbook
of
The National Reading Conference

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TTACHMENT B

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Portfolio news

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT CLEARINGHOUSE

Taking It Personally

Mark A. Faust, Ronald D. Kieffer, and Jane Hansen

Taking It Personally: Teacher-Researchers Using Portfolios to Support Rather Than to Judge Their Work

The idea that portfolios may offer an alternative to standardized evaluation methods has generated considerable interest and experimentation in recent years. We are encouraged by the fact that in school districts and colleges nationwide, a steadily growing number of students use portfolios in a variety of ways to document and enhance their learning. The fact that many future teachers create portfolios in connection with their courses of study (Ford 1994; McLaughlin 1994; McMahon 1994; Udelhofen 1994) is also an encouraging development. But there is a third area that is receiving less attention than we believe it deserves: the teacher's own portfolio. In addition to researching portfolio possibilities in our classes, each of us creates our own portfolio to help us better understand what we ask our students to do. Last year, the three of us shared our portfolios with each other at the National Reading Conference and decided to propose a colloquium at the 1994 conference in San Diego that would bring together other teacher-researchers interested in sharing their personal experiences with portfolios. The purpose of this article is to describe what we are learning as we create and share our portfolios.

Portfolios: A View from the Inside

We each began with familiar notions about portfolios: (1) They are collections of work and (2) these collections are used for evaluation. We asked ourselves questions about the purposes of our portfolios and how they might be presented to potential audiences. Will I use my portfolio to evaluate my teaching? Will I use it to show how I use my knowledge as a parent in my teaching? What influence will my portfolio have on my class when I share it with them? The individual contexts created by our unique responses to these questions guided the process each of us used to select specific items drawn from our past, present, and future experiences. Each of our portfolios also includes reflections upon individual items and the collection as a whole. In all of the ways described so far, our portfolios look a lot like those that our students produce.

(continued on page 12)

Student to Student: Getting the Most out of Your Portfolio

Jon Foreman

If it weren't for portfolios, I'd be very depressed right now. I would have left my senior English class knowing how hard I had worked, with nothing to show for what I had put into the class. The work would have left me ready for college but loathing the English language. My final portfolio allowed me to admire the ground that I had covered in the course of the year. But more importantly, my portfolio inspired me to reach for new heights in the future. Of course, looking back to see what I had accomplished made the year much more worthwhile, but looking forward towards future goals showed my desire to improve. This aspiration to grow could not have been achieved without a portfolio.

However, a portfolio can be an overwhelming project. My first portfolio, in my sophomore year, was not a very fulfilling experience. I was proud of what I had accomplished but my portfolio was a worthless reiteration of what I had done. It had no depth and documented only what was necessary. Instead of looking forward with high hopes to achieve more, I could only wait to forget

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Taking It Personally

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In other aspects, however, our experiences with portfolios turned out to be much less similar, given the current trend toward using portfolios solely as a method of evaluation. Over time, the three of us have come to view our portfolios not as static entities but as ongoing events that are still evolving. We have found that they take on new and interesting meanings every time we share them with a different audience. We have learned as well that the process of composing portfolio reflections can be more subtle and complex than we anticipated it would be. Perhaps the most striking development in our thinking about portfolios is evidenced by in our motivation for continuing to work on them. It is clear to us that we use our portfolios to learn about ourselves and to *support* our engagement with particular questions and concerns which we care about deeply. We simply do not view our portfolios primarily as providing a basis for *judging* our writing or our performance as teachers or learners.

After discussing these issues with students and colleagues at home and more recently at the National Reading Conference in San Diego, we have learned that others share our emerging sense that, because portfolios have the potential of serving multiple purposes, we as teachers need to be thoughtful about how we introduce them to students. The experience of creating portfolios of our own has made us aware of possibilities that are likely to be eclipsed when portfolios are created solely as products to be judged rather than as sources of reflection and growth. In the following section, we will briefly describe the portfolios we are creating, elaborate on the issues raised above, and refer to other voices including some of those we heard at our National Reading Conference colloquium.

Accounting for Change

The portfolio Mark created focuses on his experiences as a high school English teacher during a time when he transformed his stance toward teaching. The purpose of his portfolio is to support Mark's attempt to better understand the genesis and development of a specific period of change in his life. Accomplishing this, he hopes, will enhance his ability in the future to understand and empathize with the needs of beginning teachers. Mark has revised his beliefs about the relationship between theory and practice in teacher development by selecting and reflecting upon:

1. handouts, assignments, and exams created at the time;
2. samples of student writing;
3. academic writing he produced then as a graduate student;
4. informal writing he produced in response to literary texts; and
5. items drawn from various journals he created during the years in question.

The following sentences appear in a reflection he wrote based on a journal entry that was originally composed eleven years ago: "I'm just beginning [in 1994] to question the adequacy of the theory-into-practice metaphor that until now has guided my thinking about teacher change. Authentic purposes for learning, questioning, reading as event, reading/writing connections—all had become major concerns for me by 1983, but I continue to work on living those concerns in response to the changing situations of my professional life." Where Mark once saw a straightforward process of generating practice by reflecting on theory, he now sees a more complex and ongoing process of generating theory by reflecting on practice. Creating a portfolio focusing on change has contributed to Mark's recognition that his evolution as a teacher has been much more complex and less linear than he had remembered it to be.

Making Life Connections

During the past two years, Ron's portfolio has changed according to his changing portfolio purposes. At first, he attempted to understand the processes that his students encountered as they constructed their own portfolios. He assembled academic writing and examples of his teaching, but he was dissatisfied because the portfolio lacked personal investment and a strong voice. It also lacked connections to his life before and during professorship. Ron decided to re-focus and gather stories from his own schooling, family history, and elementary school teaching. His portfolio purpose shifted toward his learning about the portfolio process for reasons of self-fulfillment. The most recent version of his portfolio is housed entirely on a "laptop" computer. Three portfolio pieces that represent these changes are:

1. a QuickTime movie of his family storybook reading time;
2. a letter written to his eight-month-old son Evan; and
3. a story written about a pivotal literacy event for Kelley, his daughter, when she was thirteen months old.

The letter written and shared in a writer's workshop during Ron's middle school composition class connects his family to his teaching as he models reading/writing processes. Kelley's story represents a moment in time which alone appears isolated, but in combination with other stories begins to build an ethnography of Kelley's life, defining her as a learner. The family video not only demonstrates important principles about family literacy, but also serves as a way of remembering the richness of Ron's family experience. These tangible pieces of his life story create a clear picture of him by connecting the people and events in his life to his teaching and research. As Ron continues to gather and tell stories about his personal and professional history, he reaffirms how connected everything really is, and how his portfolio ultimately represents a self-narrative, a whole life portfolio.

Finding a Voice

Jane started her portfolio in the summer of 1989 and has revised it constantly since that time. It has served and continues to serve many purposes. The most salient one for this article is her evaluation of her evolution as a researcher. Her portfolio begins with her early years on the farm in Minnesota where her family placed value on the strength of each person's ability to make decisions, a precursor to her research in classrooms where students' voices carry as much weight as that of the teacher.

She then shows her early teaching career and includes a quote from her creative drama professor, "Don't ever ask for permission to do something you know is right in your teaching. You might be told no."

Jane ends with her years of research at the University of New Hampshire, and sets a goal for her present project: "My partner (an eleventh-grade, U.S. History teacher) and I will create a classroom in which the students see themselves as a part of, rather than apart from, U.S. history."

When the authors shared their portfolios in preparation for their session at NRC, Mark and Ron supported Jane's effort with their responses. Ron said, "You want your students to be strong enough to tell their own stories." Mark built on that, "History isn't really about the past; it's about who you're going to be." The same can be said about portfolios.

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Taking It Personally

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Portfolios: What for? Who for?

Portfolios are generally touted as alternative, authentic methods for judging progress and/or performance (e.g., Anson 1994; Heiden and Scanlon 1994; Tierney et al. 1991; Valencia et al. 1994). Indeed, the three of us have used portfolios for this purpose in our own classes. In addition, we have spoken with colleagues representing a full range of academic levels (pre-kindergarten through college) who have done the same. On one hand, all this experimentation has persuaded us that portfolio use does in fact offer a productive alternative for teachers seeking to supplement or replace more traditional methods of evaluation. On the other hand, our personal experience with creating portfolios has confirmed a suspicion that something important is lost when portfolios are used for purposes of external evaluation and grading. Consequently, we want to consider further those issues raised above, which to us suggest at least the possibility of there being, so to speak, an alternative to the alternative.

Since our portfolios were self-initiated, we experienced the kind of freedom that authors enjoy when they make crucial decisions regarding the purpose and development of their creative endeavors. The significance of this sense of authorship is evident in the personal commitment each of us feels toward our portfolios as ongoing events in our lives. Other experienced teachers we know who author their own portfolios have expressed similar feelings about discovering ownership of the purpose. This insight leads directly to the idea that ownership, is in a sense, the driving purpose for making a portfolio.

One member of our colloquium in San Diego, Norma, spoke about constantly revising her portfolio which she described as representing the diverse and evolving literacies that give meaning to her life. A portfolio, she said, can be "an ongoing you." Portfolios do seem to offer a way to revisit and reclaim aspects of our lives as we gain an understanding of our personal and professional growth (see Zebrosky 1994). Our concern is that the full potential of this power may be compromised in situations where the authority to determine the purpose for making a portfolio is assumed by someone other than those who are expected actually to create them.

Alongside the crucial question of purpose lies an equally important question: Who are the implied readers of a portfolio? In the absence of a predetermined audience (e.g., an external evaluator of some sort), we have been free to immerse ourselves in writing to explore what our portfolios might mean to us in light of the ongoing purposes they were designed to serve. We suspect that other "levels" or "layers" of reflection (authorship) might be required if we ever want to target potential audiences beyond ourselves, colleagues, and students, who care about us as individuals.

Responding to this issue, Jerry, another participant in our colloquium, talked about a special "synergy" that arises when teachers "link autobiography with curriculum inquiry." In his view, communities of teachers and learners may serve to expand the potential audience for portfolios such as ours. Not convinced by this argument, Becky observed that a discontinuity will inevitably exist between the private value of portfolio reflections and the pressure towards standardization exerted by schools and other public settings. In general, the discussion in San Diego confirmed our belief that writing portfolio reflections or evaluations about artifacts is a more complex and challenging process than is commonly recognized in the literature on portfolios.

Questions about purpose and audience bring into bold relief the distinction between using portfolios to support learning versus using them to judge progress or performance. Where an audience consists of one or more external evaluators whose primary concern is to judge a portfolio according to preset criteria, the potential for an author/reader relationship is nearly, if not completely, silenced and with it that aspect of the portfolio process which we find most engaging. On the other hand, readers who are willing to revise their expectations in response to an individual's portfolio seem to us a productive alternative.

During our colloquium, Jane described her habit of welcoming opportunities to share her portfolio, which has meant that she constantly revises her reflections to include new insights gathered from the responses of others. In her view, "sharing keeps it alive" while "achieving closure" would not be a very relevant goal for her portfolio. In classroom situations wherein this high degree of personal responsibility for purpose and audience is limited or absent, a portfolio all too easily becomes just another assignment drained of the positive energy that has caused so much optimism about this "alternative" (Roemer 1991). We believe our direct, personal experience with portfolios encourages the acceptance of multiple purposes, supports self-evaluation, and prompts us to seek constructive audiences.

Portfolios: An Alternative View

We want to emphasize that we are not proposing a particular format for using portfolios. Our primary contention is simply that students ought to participate as much as possible in the decision-making process that will affect their role as creators of their own portfolios. We believe there are several questions, beginning with the question of who will create a portfolio, that guide the evolution of portfolios and that each one ought to be negotiable in particular classroom situations. What motivates a student in a particular class to become the creator of a portfolio? To what extent will students be able to determine the purposes of their portfolios? Might other options be made available to those who resist the notion of creating a portfolio?

Other questions pertain to the details of the portfolios. What will be included in individual portfolios? How will the contents be arranged? What will the physical containers look like? What set of expectations will guide the composition of "reflections"? With whom might individual students expect to share their portfolios? Under what conditions might this sharing take place?

If portfolios are going to be used for evaluation purposes, then what exactly are those purposes and how will these be connected with the expressed needs of students? Who will do the evaluating and how will the evaluations be carried out? Our personal experience with portfolio processes leads us to conclude that the decisions raised in all of the above questions need to be explicitly addressed and that the responsibility for making them ought to reside as much as possible in the hands of individual portfolio creators.

We understand that institutional constraints, especially those that mandate a direct connection between evaluation and grading, can transform what appears to be a sensible enough proposal in the abstract into a troubling process in actual practice. This concern notwithstanding, we stand behind the idea that portfolio creators should enjoy all the rights and responsibilities that go along with genuine authorship. Furthermore, the process

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of creating our own portfolios has resulted in products that are ongoing, that connect our personal and professional lives in highly individual ways, and that would not be very useful for purposes of judging any aspect of our progress or performance as teachers or learners. We are not claiming that our approach to the portfolio process should be universalized as a new standard for portfolio use across all situations. Our stance is that among the multiple purposes for using portfolios in school settings there ought to be some opportunity to use them for purposes other than judging and grading. Teachers and students who design their own portfolios for their own purposes may discover, as we did, a powerful way to connect with and share their goals for living and learning. ■

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First Principles

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must be aware of the standards or criteria according to which they should evaluate their work. In classrooms in states or districts where standards have been adopted on a large scale, this means familiarizing students with those standards. To illustrate this approach, Hewitt includes in Chapter 8 the analytic assessment guide which he and his teacher committee designed for the Vermont Assessment, and he suggests specific activities for helping students begin to internalize such standards as they assess and revise their own work. For situations in which such standards are not imposed from outside, he suggests how teachers might facilitate class discussions which lead students to generate their own criteria for good writing.

For teachers interested in large-scale assessment, which he defines as "any assessment program that involves teachers from more than one school," Hewitt poses a set of questions that ought to be considered by all participants in the design program:

1. *What is the purpose of the assessment?*
2. *Who is to benefit?*
3. *How will the assessment serve that purpose?*
4. *How will results be reported? Will they serve the purpose? How will the beneficiary be served by this report?*
5. *What are the stakes?*
6. *What will be assessed—a portfolio, or something equivalent? Is it valued by the student as valid and important?*
7. *Do the school and local community equally value the student's performance as valid and important?*
8. *What are the specific standards of this assessment? Do they match the purposes of the assessment and can they be reported in a fashion that meets this purpose?*
9. *Is all this manageable? What is a generous, but challenging, timeline?*

In this chapter, he also discusses several issues associated with large-scale assessment, including the demands of performance-based assessment, reliability, and the implications of high versus low stakes assessment.

Chapter Nine, "Portfolios, Goal Setting, and Self-Assessment," offers examples of students engaged in thoughtful reflection on their work and provides specific suggestions for how such reflection might be supported. An inter-school writing assessment exchange as well as various approaches to encouraging students' written self-reflections are featured.

The concluding chapters of the book deal specifically with the concerns associated with using portfolios for assessment/accountability purposes. They include an analysis of the issue of reliability in scoring and of procedures for reporting results, as well as a projection into the future, which includes a look at the adversarial relationship between standardized testing companies and advocates of performance assessment. It is possible, he notes, that one way in which those companies might attempt to overcome that adversarial relationship is by getting into the business of marketing standardized portfolio assessment procedures designed to eliminate the current reliability problems associated with some portfolio assessment projects by attempting to assess students' unique portfolios against a common set of criteria.

In commenting on the implications of such efforts, Hewitt alludes to the "first principles" about the teaching of writing which he has articulated throughout the book. His experience in designing large-scale assessment and his background as a writer and teaching of writing lead him to conclude that it would be "a cruel irony, indeed, if portfolios, whose strengths lie in showing each student's unique capabilities, became—in the interest of scoring reliability—little more than long-winded standardized tests." ■

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A Portfolio Primer: Teaching, Collecting, and Assessing Student Writing is available from Heinemann 1994. ISBN #0-435-08834-3. 214 pp., $19.50.

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